

102. Equipping Women Survivors with Alexis Isham – Episode Transcript

Leah Glover Hayes: Welcome to Her Story of Success, a podcast featuring stories from influential women, trailblazers and business leaders who have defined and pursued their own versions of success and fulfillment. I'm Leah Glover Hayes, your host and CEO of Her Story of Success women's business and media collective. Today I'm interviewing Alexis Isham of the jewelry brand Resera, which used to be Unlocked. And if you've listened to our 100th episode of the panel discussion from International Women's Day, then you have already met Alexis. She was one of our awesome panelists. So her story was so amazing and powerful that I wanted to take a deeper dive into it with you today.

Alexis Isham: It's whenever we start to really just sit beside people who are going through different things in life, that we can understand what they're going through. Maybe not ever having gone through it ourselves, but we can at least hear their side of the story and try and be there for them, whatever that may look like.

Leah Glover Hayes: Alexis is the co-founder and co-president of Resera, which used to be Unlocked, an ethical jewelry brand that employs and empowers women survivors overcoming homelessness, domestic violence, incarceration, and forced relocation. An Ingram scholar alumna, Alexis graduated from Vanderbilt University in 2018 with a Bachelor's in human and organizational development and a minor in economics. Prior to studying at Vanderbilt, Alexis spent a year working at five at different non-profit internships in five different countries, learning more about poverty through the eyes of those experiencing it. Alexis is focused on using her leadership to increase opportunity and elevate the voices of marginalized women, creating pathways for sustainable change.

I am so honored and excited to have you Alexis. Thank you so much for joining.

Alexis Isham: Thank you. I'm so excited to be here.

Leah Glover Hayes: Well, for those that maybe didn't listen to the 100th episode yet. They'll go back and re-listen to it, but share with us where your business is today, who you are, and then we'll dive into your amazing story.

Alexis Isham: Yeah. So Resera, previously known as Unlocked, we just rebranded, we are a jewelry brand, employees, women survivors, overcoming a few different difficult circumstances. And we are based out of Nashville. It's kind of a jewelry manufacturing studio, really. So we started with beads and all that stuff we can talk about, but now we do lost wax casting. And so we use 100% recycled sterling silver to make different fine jewelry pieces that we melt down literally in our East Nashville studio, and the women we work with are the people who actually make the jewelry that we ended up sending out. And so we sell mainly online. But we have a few different fun partnerships that we do too for sales. And it's been really fun to see how it's grown.

Leah Glover Hayes: Yeah. Let's talk about that fun partnership that just recently launched.

Alexis Isham: Yeah. So we are super excited about it. We just this past week launched with Lauren Atkins and Loved One international for a little, they're so lovely too. Like genuinely they are great people. So it's been really fun to get to know them through that process. But yeah, we launched like exclusive collection, I guess, with them for two new jewelry pieces, I'm actually wearing one.

Leah Glover Hayes: I love it. It's a lock, correct?

Alexis Isham: Yeah. It's a little lock and a key, which is hilarious because we've been Unlocked, the name of the company for like three years, and then changed the name and immediately launched a lock necklace. So I don't know, I don't know what we're thinking, but okay.

Leah Glover Hayes: I love it. But what does Resera mean?

Alexis Isham: It actually means Unlocked in Latin. So we still have that.

Leah Glover Hayes: Yeah. It's still there. Yeah. And why did you change the name? What was the desire for that or the driver?

Alexis Isham: Yeah, there were a few things. One was just, honestly, e-commerce branding. We're trying to compete more in the e-commerce space and it was easier for SEO to have a less common word than Unlocked. I mean, there's so many things out in the world that have Unlocked. We wanted to be able to like own the domain

name, all of that. Also, we just liked the name Resera. I think it kind of is nice and like balanced and was something that we felt like we could brand a little easier than Unlocked, which has like immediate connotations of locks or maybe like things we weren't trying to necessarily connotate.

Leah Glover Hayes: Yeah. I love that. So I do want to talk a little bit about your incredible journey to founding a company from getting to know homeless people in Nashville and just having this kind of wild, crazy idea. So take us back when you were in college, share with us a little bit about where you were and what led up to you actually starting a company.

Alexis Isham: It's a pretty interesting story if I do say so myself.

Leah Glover Hayes: I think when we first talked, I think I said, wow, like at least 25 times.

Alexis Isham: I said, wow as it was happening, it was not what I said to happen with the last few years of my life. But yeah, so I'm a national native and went to Vanderbilt. And so the end of my sophomore year, I was diagnosed with Lyme disease from a tick bite. So super unexpected and ended up having to take a medical leave of absence during that time. And honestly, I just felt called to start walking around downtown Nashville and befriending people experiencing homelessness. I had already volunteered a pretty decent amount with different nonprofits in the area, especially as a Nashville native, but I really wanted the chance to like form real friendships and connections. And I obviously had the time because I was not doing anything other than getting medical treatment. And so I started walking on downtown and just honestly formed really genuine friendships with people that I still talk to today. And it was through some of those conversations that I started thinking, like there should be a company that exists to employ people coming out of homelessness while simultaneously helping them address barriers that they might be facing. Because a lot of the stories I was hearing were really talking about like how hard it is to try and create stability, whenever there's so many different things coming from different angles. And you know, like you can't feel like you can keep a hold on it. So I was just like, thinking about that kind of musing, and went to visit Vanderbilt, to see some old friends and got locked out of my car. And so I was sitting on the side of the road, just like waiting on my mom to come bring spare keys, not a glamorous

moment per se. But I was sitting there and a guy I'd known freshman year, like from the same dorm building walked by, and honestly was just being nice. And he was like, "Hey, I heard you're out of school. Tell me what's going on." So I'm talking about Lyme disease and all of these new friendships that I've started forming with people living on the streets and we just start talking and we're like, "We're going to start this company. We'll, we'll start meeting up once a week and talk about what it'll look like." And we kind of just committed in that moment to doing that. And so I was still out of school at the time, but we started meeting up once a week and talking about it.

Leah Glover Hayes: So when you started meeting up, when you say you were going to start a company, what was your vision like? What was it that you saw that you wanted to do? What were you trying to achieve with this company? And why did you do a company and not a nonprofit? Thank you by the way.

Alexis Isham: we've gotten that question a lot, honestly. And there's a few things. It's kind of funny what we were originally planning because we have no background in jewelry, I'll just be totally honest, and really no background in design either. So we kind of had no business trying to do that, but we started thinking about like things that would be high labor, that we would be able to do profitably. So we were thinking like lawn care or, you know, like all of these like super different companies and decided, we actually entered a pitch contest, that's the like longer version, but we entered a pitch contest at Vanderbilt and one of the advisors, it was like a week-long thing. And one of the advisors told us we needed to do a consumer good if we wanted to win this pitch contest, because it'd be easier to like explain how we would do it. And so we went with jewelry and ended up winning the pitch contest, and then just kind of stuck with jewelry. And we were like, "Okay, we'll just do jewelry."

Leah Glover Hayes: Wow. So from a, you getting walked out of your car to a guy that you knew stopping and saying, "Hey, what's going on?" You having a conversation and then you sat down and said, "Hey, I kinda want to think about starting a company." Did you already know that you wanted to start a company? Or is it more of getting ideas out there just for this pitch competition? Like, what was that like?

Alexis Isham: Absolutely not is the answer to wanting to start a business. Absolutely not. I had traveled a lot before college, actually, like you had mentioned. And I really wanted to, after graduation, which at that point I was a sophomore, so, I mean, that

was down the line, but I was thinking I would go live abroad, do whatever, not run something in Nashville, for sure. The pitch contest came only because we had started meeting once a week, so. But yeah, talking about starting the business, honestly, I think in the beginning was kind of theoretical for me. I wanted to play it out because it was something that I was focusing on so much during my time outside of school that I wanted to, to try and think of a solution. Not that there's an easy fix. And I knew that even then, and I think I know even more now, but yeah, we started talking about it kind of theoretically, and then did this pitch contest, kept meeting about it and became more and more concrete until we were like, okay, actually, you know, kind of hit an inflection point of, are we going to do this after we graduate? By this point, we're juniors and it's kind of time to get real about it. And we're like, are we going to do this or should we start applying to jobs like everybody else? And so I started fasting and praying about it and was just seeking an answer, I guess, one way or the other. And I didn't want to do anything dramatic without knowing what was going on. And so during that time of discernment for me, one of my good friends called and his name was Ray, and he had actually been homeless most of his life. And we had met years and years prior before the Lyme disease before all of that, and just kind of had been like adopted grandpa/granddaughter relationship. I had met him when I was volunteering one day. Anyway, I'm in this period of discernment and he calls me, and Ray says, "Alexis, you need to come to the hospital. I'm dying." And so I go, and we have just this amazing conversation about his life and what it had meant to him. And as I was getting up, it had been hours. And at the end of that conversation, he's like, "Actually I had one more thing. I have a storage unit. And in that unit I have a duffel bag of money. And whenever I pass, I want you to have it." And so in this honestly, very unexpected turn of events, a man who literally didn't even own a mattress, became the primary investor, so to speak, in what would become a company to employ other people coming out of homelessness.

Leah Glover Hayes: That is just one of those things that there's going to be a movie about this. Like at some point there's gonna be a movie. And people will be watching this movie like, "There is no way that a homeless person that didn't own a mattress would have a duffel bag of money in a storage unit and give to someone," that, I mean, you went to Vanderbilt. It's not like you didn't have some sort of means, right? Like or family or something. And I love that he ended up becoming your first, we'll say

air quotes, investor, when you were seeking an answer. And I just think that for the woman listening that there's something on your heart, you want to do it, and when I think about your story is how many people have started consumer good products, right? It's so hard to be a business owner. Like so hard. And when you have all these things, I think sometimes the thing that I love about your story is that you really did it. This is what it looks like to take one step at a time. This is what it looks like to stop into process and say, where am I today? What am I trying to do? And keeping the core of your mission, like at the center of everything. And not taking a step until you see the next answer. So I'm sure like, okay, this man Ray tells you, "I have a bag of money in a storage unit." You kind of can't say, no, you can't step back at that point. Cause you're like, well, I've been seeking this as my answer. I'm moving forward. So let's go from there to like, you guys have started your company. What were the next steps after that? How did that get going?

Alexis Isham: Yeah, I mean, again, it's kind of like the sitting on the side of the road thing. Like it, it makes for a good story, but it wasn't like amazing or, you know, anything glorious at the time.

Leah Glover Hayes: It's not like it was \$300,000.

Alexis Isham: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, literally it was a few thousand dollars and we gave half of it to one of his other best friends who had been homeless, who actually is now a medical assistant. So that's kind of a beautiful story too. Yeah. And he used the money to go to college. Isn't that crazy?

Leah Glover Hayes: That's like the mission of what you're doing already before you even get started a little bit

Alexis Isham: So when we first started Corbin and I were like, okay, let's just start with the basics again. We had no background in jewelry, so it's not like we bring on this big VC team. We're like, okay, we're doing all these things. We started very humbly. So we literally went to Home Depot and bought some copper wires that were not meant to be used for jewelry. And we were like, let's see if we can like hammer these out and turn it into something people would wear. And the answer is no, we, we sold like maybe five to my mom and my best friends. And then we were like, okay, not that. And we just kept iterating and iterating. We tried beads and did that for a little bit.

And we tried all sorts of things. This was a lot of experimentation while we were still seniors. And when we finally graduated, we still didn't really know what we were doing, but we were really committed despite that. And so we moved into our studio, I guess, into Corbin's bedroom, and he had roommates. So it was, it was a whole hectic situation. And by that point we had already hired two women to work with us that we had met through kind of randomly, I mean, in the beginning it was really me just like meeting people, being like, Hey, do you want a job? Like there was no recruitment funnel or anything like that. Obviously now we work with nonprofits and caseworkers, and then actually this was another time of fasting and praying, but I was like, okay, we need to get out of this, this bedroom. Let me like look for an answer. And Ryan LeSaur, who is the executive director of Community Care Fellowship just happened to reach out to me via email and was like, Hey, I heard about your company, which is crazy to me now, because in retrospect I'm like what company? I mean, we were like in a bedroom with four people, but regardless, he reached out and was like, Hey, like I heard about what you're doing. I would love to talk more about it.

Leah Glover Hayes: And what was the name of his organization?

Alexis Isham: Community Care Fellowship, CCS. They are a nonprofit in East Nashville that is, I mean, they do a lot, but they're mainly a day shelter and they have hot meals and warm showers and over the counter medication. And so we, we went to their space and really fell in love with what each other was doing and, and recognized ways that we could really help each other grow. And so we moved our entire operation into the back of CCS, the non-profit and, and started to really lay some roots that way. And that's when we started getting more into events and got a website, you know and all of that kind of stuff. And then I would say it was a few months of that before we were like, okay, you know, we were, we were still very small, but at least to the point where we were thinking, if we want to really scale, we need to do something different. And so that was probably the biggest risk other than the first one, which was obviously going full-time. But we decided to invest in a process that again, we really didn't know much about, but called lost wax casting. And so we got our own studio in East Nashville and invested in all of this equipment so that we could basically use 3D printers to make molds of products and then melt down metal and pour it into the molds. And then that's what we would file and polish and whatever,

and sell so far more industrial than a lot of the beaded products we had been doing.

Leah Glover Hayes: You said that you invested, so where did the money come from to actually make that investment? Was it out of your pocket where you weren't getting paid yet? Like what did the finances around that look like?

Alexis Isham: So we were not paying ourselves at that point. And the duffel bag money had by far run out by that point, there isn't a whole lot to go around and so. It was a lucky move and a fateful move in some ways. But we ended up meeting the CFO of a larger ethical jewelry brand and just ethical fashion company in Nashville and talked with them a while. And they were just really being nice and showing us around and showing us how they do things and Corbin and I, in this moment of like, we need to figure out something big to do, asked if we could have a meeting with their entire executive team and basically brought them a pitch of how, if they would give us some of the upfront money to invest in this equipment, that we would start making them jewelry. And basically they could outsource their products more ethically and efficiently than they currently did. And surprisingly, they went for it.

Leah Glover Hayes: And they had a similar model also where they were hiring women to empower them also. Correct? So that, that was a good piece of it. Very cool.

Alexis Isham: Yeah. So it worked out really well.

Leah Glover Hayes: I want to pause on that for a second, because there's so much conversation right now about women getting funding and something that my business partner, Melissa Aldridge, she is in finance with Village Capital, which is a global VC group. She's so passionate about saying, "Hey. It's not just VC money or bank funding. Like you can get creative." And I love that you got really creative and said, "Hey, what if we partner with another company in our industry that aligns with our mission? And we asked them for an upfront cost, like an upfront investment, and then we continue to partner with them." So I want the person listening to be like, you can get creative on people investing into you and your company and your business that may not already exist today, or may not be like a check box of, are you getting VC money? Are you getting a bank loan? So I just say, hey way to work smarter and figure that out, you know? And so, okay. You've, you've taken the big risk of actually

going full time, not paying yourself. And then, you know, this was a big risk asking somebody to invest into you because now you have to deliver. So let's talk about the challenge that happened once you start making the jewelry.

Alexis Isham: Yeah. So we got this pretty large PO, by far the biggest thing we'd ever done and then bought the equipment. And we were like, okay, now we have to learn how to do this process so we can deliver what they've asked for. And it was to be frank, it was horrible. It was so hard. We had no idea what we were doing. We didn't have all of the right equipment, none of the right training, you know, all of that, but we were like, we have to deliver. I mean, there is no option.

Leah Glover Hayes: What was it that made it hard?

Alexis Isham: Physically it was legitimately kind of painful because we had to use little, like they're like spinning wheels basically. And that's how we would like polish the things, but we didn't yet know all of the tricks of how to not make it hot. So we would burn our fingers like over and over and over. And it was just that paired with the realization of like, how much more there was, you know, we're like, Oh my gosh, we have to do thousands of these, you know, that kind of thing. And by that point, we had obviously hired more women to help us out with that. But we were trying to train on something we had no idea how to actually do so it was, it was really hard. And then that eventually led us to the realization of, we were making everything for \$12 and selling it for 8. So literally we were just forking over money, hand over fist because we couldn't make them profitably yet. And it was right then that COVID hit. So it's kind of funny. We were like, this is the worst thing that's ever happened, you know? And then COVID hits and we're like, okay, this is the worst thing that's ever happened. You know.

Leah Glover Hayes: You're like, wow. It actually got worse. How did that happen?

Alexis Isham: We were wrong.

Leah Glover Hayes: How many women have faced that? Or, I mean, men and women face that in 2020, how did that end up being a blessing as it turns out.

Alexis Isham: So we ended up having to furlough everyone, and we were actually very blessed already in that I didn't even mention this part, but aside the

employment, we have the program that we try and provide holistic care for all the women we work with. So we had gotten master lease apartments for everyone. So everyone was already in housing. And that is probably one of the biggest blessings of that entire thing is everyone was insecure housing whenever they had to get furloughed.

Leah Glover Hayes: And while you're explaining this for the person listening, one of the things you said when you were really passionate about helping people get jobs that were homeless, but you also said it's about all the other barriers that surround someone that's homeless, not just getting them a job, but all the other things. What all did you provide in that? What barriers were you trying to address for them?

Alexis Isham: So we're continually adding on because we're so excited about all the things we can do, but what we offer at this point is housing, which is probably the most exciting, through CCF, the nonprofit I'd mentioned and Urban Housing Solutions. Yeah. So two nonprofits that have come together to help us offer that. And then we have a career counselor who comes on a regular basis and meets with everyone to go over, in the beginning, very like foundational, but career goals and the different skills that they need to achieve. And then eventually helping them apply for other jobs. Because our goal is everyone we work with will move into a home and job of her own before she ends up leaving us and graduating, basically. And then we have a financial trainer who meets with everyone regularly and goes over, obviously budgeting and savings and credit building. And we make sure everyone is in regular therapy, and we have a few like nonprofit resources to make sure they can get that for free. And we're about to start working with a health specialist, which I'm super excited about.

Leah Glover Hayes: Oh my gosh. That's awesome.

Alexis Isham: That was something that I had been wanting to do for a while, because I know how much health, especially with all of my health troubles that I had had earlier, I know how much health affect all aspects of your life. So I'm really excited to start working with her.

Leah Glover Hayes: I am so impressed that you literally, from a moment in your life, you had this desire to help. And a few short years later, cause I'm sure that right, even

in this moment, I mean, you and I are talking like on a Saturday, cause you've been just so crazy busy, but I just want to honor you for a moment and be like, Alexis, you had a vision a few years ago and step by step, not just made that happen, because I know that you're going to give credit to a lot of other people and they did. But the important part of that is you never had an ego and you understood that you were one piece of this larger vision. And I love that you, you know, Corbin, all you did was share your vision and then you allowed other people to say, "Oh my gosh, what if we did this?" Like you didn't say, "This is my vision. It's going to be my way. And this is the way that we're doing it." I do want to talk a little bit about. What did the process of partnering with people, what did it look like with Corbin when you said, okay, I want to start offering housing and all these things? I do want to talk about how you developed those partnerships and made it happen so that you, you know, have a for-profit company. You're hiring people. You're getting all of these things. You can't do that by yourself. Right. And so the, I think one of the things I'm really passionate about is you can't do anything all by yourself. So I'd love for you to teach us a little bit of, like, how did that look like to really build that team around you, of making this thing happen in such a short amount of time? This is like only a few years. I mean, what you've accomplished could take people, you know, 20 years to do.

Alexis Isham: Thank you. Thank you so much. I really, really appreciate that. Yeah. And there really are so many people that have helped and have done so much. And so. I don't feel like I can really take credit. It's been really incredible to see how things have worked together. But as far as building some of those partnerships, a lot of it honestly was this is rooted in some of that larger philosophy of just caring for other people and basically asking other people what they need and then helping them find that as opposed to telling them what they need and then like giving it to them, even if they didn't ask for it, you know, that kind of thing.

Leah Glover Hayes: Ooh, real quick. Where did that come from? Cause I feel like that reminds me of the book *When Helping Hurts*.

Alexis Isham: That is one of my favorite books. That's so funny that you say that, I love that book. Yes. I think I learned a lot of that through the gap year that I took, actually, even before college, because that's when I had spent the five non-profit internships in five different countries. And so, especially at that point, I was 18, you

know, so it was pretty humbling to just walk into non-profits and basically say, "Okay, what can I do?" And, you know, and kind of fit myself into it. But. I think over and over again, that message kind of subliminally was hammered into my head, of the best way to help someone else is to figure out what they need and be there for them and support them and not come in with your own ideas and force that on them. So a lot of the programming that we've done has been, we do one-on-one interviews with all of our makers every month. The one-on-one is mainly so I can get like more honest feedback, but it's about different things that would be really helpful for them or things we could do better, stuff like that. And that's really where we come up with all of our funding, is throwing out a lot of the common patterns, and then how can we help make that more accessible?

Leah Glover Hayes: What does that partnership look like with the nonprofits that they're serving the people? Like, are you donating money through your company, to these nonprofits? Or what does that look like?

Alexis Isham: It kind of depends based on the service. For the financial training and the career counseling, that we actually just fund completely out of profit. So we're really thankful to be able to do that. And not to like plug the company, but it truly is only because people buy things that we can do that.

Leah Glover Hayes: Yeah. So that would be like a normal company providing like benefits to their employees. Correct? So that's how you're looking at that. Okay. Perfect. I'm just always looking in like the, either like the human resources or the operational, like what does that look like? You're paying like, this is a benefit as an employee.

Alexis Isham: And then the housing, that's mainly through Community Care Fellowship. So they have been, since we first met them, like I told you, in the back of their nonprofit, they have been so gracious with us. So they have a grant that they've been working off of that helps provide housing subsidies for everyone that we work with. So whenever someone moves in, we get their first month completely free through CCS. And then after that, they pay a third of their income. And so generally people who are moving into our housing start at three days a week, and then after about a month moved to four days a week. And then full-time. And so by the time they're at full-time, which is usually two to three months into their time at Rivera,

that's when they're paying full rent. Usually by month two, they're already paying full rent. So it ends up being less of an expense than it would be, if we were paying full rent the whole time, it kind of was structured to be a scale-up. So that obviously it would decrease the amount needed, and also would help create those rhythms so that after our makers graduate and leave there, they're already in the rhythm of paying full rent. And that's not like a huge drop off for them.

Leah Glover Hayes: That's so huge that you talk about that back to like *When Helping Hurts*, you're giving someone an actual job. So they're, they're making money, and I love that you used rhythm. You know, I think about like when someone lives with her parents then goes off for their first time. How great it is for the parents that already made them pay rent or so that you get used to that. You know what I mean? I mean, a lot of us that are entrepreneurs or successful, you know, had jobs when we were in high school and, you know what I mean? Like I paid for my own phone. I paid for my own car. I paid for my own insurance. So when I left and I lived on my own, I didn't struggle like some of my friends did, because I had already been in that rhythm of paying for myself. And it's like, I mean, my parents didn't have money, but like, gosh, what a blessing that was for me. So when I didn't live with them, I, you know, I feel like I had a leg up cause I had that. So for them, I think about gosh, how great it is for them to also have the ability to be proud of themselves, to be like, "I am paying my own rent or at least a portion of it. I am making my own money. I'm able to provide for myself. And I'm able to like, I don't know, go buy a cheeseburger when I want one or a candy bar or something completely." I love that.

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Leah Glover Hayes: What are some of the success stories that you've seen of your makers? Like what are some of the things that light you up that when you have your worst days that you can like, think about this story of a maker to be like, "Oh, this is what holds me down."

Alexis Isham: Yeah, that's a really fun question. So there's one that I've told a few times that I think is really fun, but one of our very first makers was named Gwen. And she was with us in the like making beaded things in the bedroom kinda moments. Like she was really an OG maker at the time that we were working in the back of CCF. We had started talking with her, and we hadn't even built out all of our programming yet, but she was already in the housing that we had through CCS. And we started talking with her about what graduation would look like. And since I had first ever even met her, she had said that she really wanted to go into pre-K and be a pre-K teacher. And so as fate would happen, I guess, CCF ended up opening their own pre-K. And so they gave Gwen an interview and she ended up getting hired there.

Leah Glover Hayes: I'm gonna cry.

Alexis Isham: Isn't that crazy.

Leah Glover Hayes: That is so beautiful.

Alexis Isham: So we left CCS and she stayed and is now their pre-K teacher. And she's been there for, gosh, probably a year at this point and is thriving. I mean, truly

Leah Glover Hayes: I cannot. Oh, how blessed are those children that get to have as their teacher

Alexis Isham: She is just radiant? I wish you could meet her. She is so fun. She's perfect for that role.

Leah Glover Hayes: That's awesome. Yeah. That's so fun.

Alexis Isham: We hired another maker who I'll just refer to as AZ, but she came to us through a domestic violence sanctuary. And when we met her was super, super kind, but just, I think, going through a lot and kind of timid and trying to be defensive, I guess, and protect herself because yeah, she didn't learned to do.

Leah Glover Hayes: Understandable.

Alexis Isham: So she's been working with us for a few months now and is an incredible worker, like always on time, always engaged, super excited about it. Like really just gets things done and has been, I would refer to it as like blossoming, honestly, like she just has kind of come alive and she's just so much more confident, I feel like now than when we first met her and has, she's talked a lot about that and has taken on a leadership role at Resera. And she is actually graduating next week. So she is transferring the lease she has into her own name. And it's actually staying with and she's going to be our product development specialist. So she's just moving into a staff role.

Leah Glover Hayes: Oh my gosh. That's beautiful.

Alexis Isham: Yeah. So we are super, super excited about that. And that's the first maker that we've hired into a staff role. So I'm really excited to see just the ways that we continue growing and being able to do that. But I think it's going to be really, really fun and hopefully kind of encouraging to other makers we have about the different ways that you can choose to follow follow your goals and your passions.

Leah Glover Hayes: Ah, I love that. I want to talk a little bit about mentorship, because that's something that's super important to me. I love that I get this sense that mentorship is really important to you, because it sounds like what you're providing for the people, the financial courses and the therapy and all of that, I think all of that plays into mentorship, because mentorship to me is really just getting access to learn what you need for yourself to move forward in your life. Right? And so I would love to know, obviously you've had a heart for helping for years, like literally since you were a child. Who or what was the mentorship in your life that helps you on this path of putting action behind your desires from a young age?

Alexis Isham: That is a really good question. I feel like it's so cheesy to say, but I think one of them really is my mom.

Leah Glover Hayes: That's not cheesy. It's beautiful.

Alexis Isham: I feel like everyone talks about their mom, but she's amazing. So I should talk about her. Yeah. I mean, even when I was really young, I remember my mom was someone that was just so compassionate and empathetic, and every few months I feel like we would do like secret acts of kindness. And she would like, kind of take me on these things with her and we would, like I remember once one of my best friends was, her mom I guess, was really struggling financially. And we ended up giving them money, like anonymously. We like found a coworker and gave them a check, something like that. But I just, and never told them literally ever. And like, they probably still don't know, but I just remember, like, my mom was always doing things like that, and we would like go do Christmas carols with kids in the hospitals. Like she was just very outwardly loving towards both people that she knew really well and strangers. And I think that's where I got the idea that like, if you care about people, you should show it, you know, and you should do things to be that way.

Leah Glover Hayes: I love that. Well, obviously you're doing a lot of mentorship through your own company and work. Is there anything that you would, any advice that you would give to someone that's kind of on this journey trying to figure out what their passion is and how they're going to pursue it?

Alexis Isham: Yeah, I would say the best way that I've found to really test some of the things is to start actually doing them and then seeing how it goes. Not necessarily like going crazy and investing in equipment, you know, like you don't need to make risky decisions.

Leah Glover Hayes: You started super small.

Alexis Isham: Exactly. Start small and see how it is. And then continue from that. Kind of what you were saying about like, I wouldn't try and take a huge leap before I had at least crawled and just take one step at a time and see where it takes me. I also, I've said this a few times, but I really think that meeting in whatever context you can with people who are really different than you, oftentimes challenges your viewpoint and will help you be more creative and think of different things and probably be more empathetic. I mean, I know for myself personally, I would have never started Resera had I not started by just the friending people experiencing homelessness

through that bizarre period in my life, I guess, of having Lyme disease. But yeah, I think it's whenever we start to really just sit beside people who are going through different things in life that we can understand what they're going through. Maybe not ever having gone through it ourselves, but we can at least hear their side of the story, and try and be there for them, whatever that may look like.

Leah Glover Hayes: Yeah. So I want you to talk a little bit about the challenges, like the real, real challenges that you face that either almost made you quit or made you question whether you had what it took to actually follow through and do this.

Alexis Isham: Yeah. There have been many of those times, honestly. I think Corbin has always been the more unwavering of the two of us, I would say. He for whatever reason is always ready to do whatever it takes. And there've been many times that I've been like, this is too much and we should just go get different jobs and that'll be that. Whenever we were making the things that were, we were selling for eight and making for 12, that was one of the periods that was really hard. That was a tough time because my boyfriend at the time, now my husband, but was he's in the army and he was deployed, COVID hadn't quite hit yet whenever that started, but it was just a really, it was a pretty hard season for me. And I remember just feeling everyday like, "Oh my gosh, like, why are we still doing this? Like, we just need to stop. Like, it's not worth it." And this was right after the really, like, exciting moment of we convinced this much larger ethical brand to give us money, all of this good stuff. And then it just like plummeted. And I was just like, I just, I hate this. And I would say it was honestly, probably a few months before we came out of that, were able to start making things profitably, thank goodness, and move forward. But I think there've been a few times like that for various reasons. We had one maker who had kind of a breakdown and ended up having to go stay at a psych ward. And I think is still there. So that was a really hard time having to walk through that with her. There have been a few that were tough, really tough. And sitting where I am now, obviously don't outweigh all of the exciting and the good things that have happened, but it's not to say they didn't exist. And I think that's part of entrepreneurship, no matter what you're doing, that they're going to be really high highs and really low lows.

Leah Glover Hayes: So do you think you could have gone through it by yourself?

Alexis Isham: No, my gosh, no. Absolutely not. Absolutely not. For anyone who is

considering starting a company, I highly recommend a co-founder. That comes with its own challenges at time, obviously, because you'll have different ideas on how to do things and different perspectives, but at least for Corbin and I, that has absolutely made the difference between continuing or not.

Leah Glover Hayes: Yeah. Give us an example of a time that you guys had an actual, real disagreement. And how did you resolve that?

Alexis Isham: It's funny because we're both fairly passive people. We've never had like a legitimate fight, disagreement, which is, I know not the case for a lot of co-founders. And so we're lucky in that way, in some ways. Maybe it'd be good for us sometimes to just like fight it out, I don't know, but we never have truly never. But I think in the really early days, one of our disagreements was about the dynamics that we should have with makers and like boundaries, honestly, social boundaries. And I'll just be upfront and say, I have always struggled with boundaries. I mean, and it kind of makes sense. I started the company because I was walking around downtown, like befriending people, you know, but I just, I like find myself oftentimes taking this like very personal role with people. And I think that was something early on, I had to realize that I had to dial back a little bit for the sake of sustainability for myself. I was getting really emotionally burnt out with some of the things I've even mentioned with people going through really hard times that I couldn't control. And I think it's also just bad from a company perspective. Like it's kind of inappropriate to take on like a daughter role with someone that you're supposedly managing. But that was something that we had to work through where I think I was wrong, honestly, that we had to talk about. And he was like, "I think you're getting too involved in people's lives." And I was like, at the time, like, "No, we have to like, you know, be able to like really walk beside, you know, we're all equals and all of this." And I still believe that, but I think there's a way to maintain healthy boundaries for the sake of you and for the other person.

Leah Glover Hayes: Yeah, well, kudos to him for like being brave enough to call you on it. Like, that's, that's a hard thing. Like to have a business partner and have to call them on something, you know, and be like, Hey, this is, this is a discussion. That's awesome. I love that. Well, I know we only have a few more minutes, so I wanted to give you a chance to tell everyone where we can find you. And you're amazing

products.

Alexis Isham: Yes, absolutely. Yeah. So you can go to www.resera.com, and our Instagram is @_resera and our Facebook is @Resera.

Leah Glover Hayes: Awesome. And then last question is how do you define success today?

Alexis Isham: That is a good question, because I have been reflecting on this recently to be pretty vulnerable. I think with every step of growth for Resera, I've realized that the things I was like, if we get to this point, then I'll be like, we have made it, you know, and all these things. And like, honestly, even launching with Lauren Atkins this past week, when I first started, I would have been like, that will be when we're like a big company, you know, whatever. And it's kind of this like false summit that you keep putting on yourself where you're like after this we've made it. Like you're, you're doing this hike and you like, you like see the top. And you're like, "Okay, when I get to that, we're good. And then I'll like, chill and I made it." And then you get there and you're like, "Oh my gosh, I was wrong. It's one more," you know, like, and you keep doing that. And I think that I've had to check myself a few times and recognize the reality of the false summit is that success is how you define it in that moment. And it's not this thing that you're going to hit and then be like, "Okay, now I'm done."

Leah Glover Hayes: Yeah, you're never done. But if you can't celebrate it during it, then to your point, you're never gonna get to enjoy the joy of what you're doing.

Alexis Isham: Honestly. Now I define success, pretty like tangibly. I feel more successful, I guess, about the culture we have at Resera than I do about the partnerships or the revenue that we're pulling in. You know, like I feel really proud about the amazing women that we have and the ways that we interact. And I mean, they're all really good friends and we like do things for people's birthdays and their kids. Like, that's what I'm proud of. And I think that that's been healthy for me too, where it's, it's something that I can like be a part of and not feel like there's something that I'm like on the horizon, you know? Like I can kind of enjoy it as I'm still working for it.

Leah Glover Hayes: Yes. You can enjoy it while you're still working on it. I think that's so vital. And I know I listen to like Gary V and he's always talking about like, you have to

enjoy the grind, and I'm like, I don't love that term, but to your point, like, you really do have to find a way to enjoy it while you're doing it. And if you're not enjoying it or can't find the way that you're enjoying it, then that means it's maybe it's a different season for you, right? Like maybe there, you need to look at like, am I doing the right thing or. How do I pivot or shift? Right? So I love that you took one of what could have been the worst moments of your life or seasons, right? Like you, you really took this really hard season, not being able to go to school. I'm sure you had a ton of friends that you were like, Oh my God, I'm not going to graduate with my class. And instead of sulking, you went out and said, I mean, even for your mental capacity, like I need to go out and be in the community and see what's going on. And then now you have this beautiful business that's literally changing the lives of women here and now around the world, when you're partnering with, with these other sustainable brands and nonprofits, like, I hope you do get to stop in, allow yourself to feel the weight of. this beautiful thing that you've created that literally your chain, you are you yourself, you, Alexis, you are changing the world for women here and globally. Like that's amazing. That's truly like you're doing God's work now. So I'm just, I'm proud to know you and I'm inspired by you. I am also not comparing myself to you though, because you're doing what you are called to do. And I think that that's something that's very dangerous. If those of us that are listening to be like, "Oh my gosh, but she's done so much more than I have." And it's like, yes, but you're doing what you're called to do. And I'm doing what I'm called to do. And have you ever found yourself comparing to other people and getting trapped in that yourself?

Alexis Isham: Yeah. I think there have definitely been times in my life, especially from a work stance, I think less so from a personal stance, but more from like where the business is, where the business should be, you know, and almost like creating check marks of like, are we like at this business' level? Or are we at this, you know, and like kind of creating like this hierarchy in my mind of what back to this, the false summit, but like what success will look like. And if we're at this company's level, then we're successful, and I think there's really no value in that.

Leah Glover Hayes: There's not. And think about, even when you were in the moment that you got that great contract with the sustainable company, but really you were losing money. So sometimes when you compare your, your business to another business, you don't know what's going on on the inside. You don't know that they

might be in trouble or hurting, or really, you know, suffering as founders. So I think it's beautiful that you really focus on enjoying the journey that you're on and really saying, I did get to this summit. Let me take a moment and just look out at the beauty. Even though I have really far to go like, look how far I've already come and let me, like, I think about literally being on a mountain and stopping at the little, they always have like the rest areas, the viewpoints it's like, yeah. Now let's walk for a second and walk over there and be like, "Wow. I might not be where I want to go, but golly, where I'm at is gorgeous. Like this view. I'm over the fog, you know, or like, wow, let's enjoy the foliage that we're seeing." You know, I do like to hike. So I literally try to like, think about that.

Alexis Isham: This is very tangible, I like that. This is meditation.

Leah Glover Hayes: People that are not outdoorsy are like, "Oh my God, Leah. No," but...

Alexis Isham: I'm with you. I love it.

Leah Glover Hayes: Well, I've enjoyed this conversation. I just appreciate all the wisdom and yeah, I would love to just keep following up with you. Thank you so much for being with us today.

Alexis Isham: Absolutely. Thank you so much!

Leah Glover Hayes: Thanks for tuning in! At Her Story of Success, we are on a mission to help women-business owners, leaders and professionals build your tribe and reach your next level of success by connecting you to one another, equipping you with resources and empowering you along your journey. We would love for you to be a part of our tribe and further this mission by sharing this podcast with a friend or co-worker you want to help succeed. And you can stay up to date with all of our episodes, blogs and events by signing up for our newsletter at Herstoryofsuccess.com.

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